

**AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES**  
**February 8, 2007**

**Members Present:** Daniel Clapp, Elsie Fetterman, Doris Holden, Rosemary Kofler, Tom McAuley, Barbara Sutherland, David Yaukey

**Absent:** Ed Kaler, Susan Whitbourne

**Select Board Liaison:** Gerry Weiss

**Staff Present:** Nancy Pagano (Director/Program Director), Maura Plante (Assistant Director/Services), Karen Erman (Administrative Assistant)

**Absent:** Marlene Barnett (Program Coordinator)

**Guests:** Marge Babb, Jane Diamond, Ferne Finger, Deb Jankowski, Larry Shaffer (Town Manager)

**Welcome:**

Barbara Sutherland, Chair, called the Council on Aging meeting to order at 9:10 AM.

**Minutes of Previous Meeting:**

The minutes of the December 14, 2006 meeting were accepted and approved.

**Senior Trust Treasurer's Report:**

**Doris** distributed copies of the report. She reported donations of \$135.00 in memory of Grace Thayer and unspecified donations for \$50.00 in response to the Senior Spirit request. Investments are doing well. Dan pointed out an apparent drop in one of the investment funds. Doris explained that she had transferred money out of that fund into the checking account. The report was accepted and approved.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Independent Transportation Network:**

**Nancy** introduced **Jane Diamond** who presented a video of a CBS news report from 2004 discussing ITN as a means of reducing the number of auto fatalities caused by elderly drivers (12% in 2004). ITN is a non-profit organization funded by donations, underwritten by private businesses and staffed by paid and volunteer drivers. ITN arranges transportation through a computerized system to seniors, in cars, 24/7. Seniors pay an annual membership fee and either pay cash or set up an account against which the rides are debited – average cost of a ride is \$8.00. The program has been successfully operating in Portland, Maine for 10 years. Jane would like to organize a community forum to discuss and look into mobilizing such a supplemental transportation program (STP) at the grassroots level.

**Town Manager Addresses Proposed Budget "Deficit Busting Plan":**

**Larry Shaffer** presented an overview of the current budget problems. John Musante's projections indicate that if the Town were to level fund we would need \$2.3 million in additional funds. Budgets were submitted based on the framework of a 1% increase over last year. But the increased cost of health insurance and other fixed costs would require a 2.5% decrease in every other service. Larry's budget was submitted at 0.9% higher than last year and included a list of about 50 items for restoration or additions for next year should the SB or Finance Committee find other revenues to support those services. Included in those 'extras' is \$15,000 for the Senior Center to restore the Program Coordinator's hours and for supplies and materials. The SB is discussing an override to be placed on the ballot – if so, what type and when. Larry is hopeful for other revenue sources: a UMass contribution toward fire and ambulance service and a modest increase in state aid (perhaps 2%). Larry intends to recommend to the SB a multiyear override in addition to budget cuts and more aggressive efforts in searching for outside revenues. How would this affect the Senior Center? Worst-case scenario would be the loss of 10 hours of Program Coordinator time and some supplies and materials.

COA members posed many questions:

**David** asked for clarification of the multiyear override. Larry explained a large override would cover the first few years and would be married with agreements that annual budget increases would be capped at a certain percent. It fixes the revenue and fixes the expense growth but does not affect the tax rate.

**Gerry** added that with a multiyear override a large part would occur the first year and peoples taxes WOULD go up – perhaps 15%. Once taxes have gone up they stay up and every override beyond that goes on top of the previous increase. The advantage is that we don't have to go through this every year. It builds in discipline and we know exactly how much we will have to work with each year. But it is very hard on the taxpayers.

**Maura** asked Larry to explain his comment at a meeting last week - "No group in the country is better taken care of than the elderly and they need our help the least". Larry explained that within the Human Services network including the homeless, single women with children, all the poor and disenfranchised, statistics show that the seniors are the best off and have the most services, beginning with Social Security. Larry says he has a long background in Social Services and feels that children are the worst off. He does not mean to be disrespectful to the elderly, but as a Town we need to look at where our resources go. Maura reminded Larry that she sees numerous seniors on a daily basis who struggle and just can't make it.

**Barbara** asked if future plans include a reorganization of the Senior Center. Larry said that is very likely and he will be talking with heads of departments at Bangs about that prospect. We need to bring services to the community as efficiently as possible because of limited resources.

**Daniel** asked if Larry sees the same lack of Social Service distribution to children in Amherst as he sees in other parts of the country. Those are statistics that Larry has not yet to looked into. Larry would like to see an oversight group established that can assess where needs exist and how best to distribute the money allocated to Human Services (only \$140,000 for FY06).

**Gerry** added that there is tremendous hidden poverty in Amherst, especially for children and single mothers.

**Elsie** reminded us to encourage seniors who qualify to look into the program that allows them to work in order to reduce their property taxes.

**Nancy** stressed the level of concern for the Senior Center staff due to the increasing number of elderly. Many elderly are finding themselves newly poor and there is talk of Social Security being cut. The Senior Center budget has been cut year after year and operates in crisis mode. The Program Coordinator position was cut to 30 hours last year and may now be cut to 20 hours, yet that is that person who helps deliver meals when one of the drivers can't show up. There are a huge number of elders who live at the poverty level that rely on us for their basic human needs. The population of elders continues to grow and will double in the next 10-15 years. We are gravely concerned that we will no longer be able to serve these people with continuous budget cuts. Larry stated that the Senior Center is not being targeted – the problem is systemic and everyone will be affected. The voters of the community will make the final decisions on the override and cuts.

**Elsie** asked when we would know about state aid. Larry said the Governor's budget will be out late February or early March.

**Gerry** reminded us of why the Town is in such trouble. In 2001 the state voted for a tax cut. One year later state aid dropped and continued to go down each year after that. Had state aid remained the same we would have \$9 million more today, yet the Town kept spending the money as if the state aid had never gone down – we took the money out of the reserve fund. Health insurance costs are hurting us. Employee benefits are up 25%.

**Elsie** spoke of a federal Grant that could potentially be applied for by the Commonwealth that would provide nursing home dollars for people to receive care in their own home.

**Gerry** reintroduced the idea of using 5% of the money from our Trust Fund to supplement the Program Coordinator position.

## **CONTINUING BUSINESS**

### **Senior Trust Paperwork/Friends:**

**Attorney Deb Jankowski** provided a handout from the Secretary of State office on how non-profits operate and a copy of the application. We will incorporate as a non-profit corporation. We already have by-laws. It will be helpful to have officers elected before we apply. We will apply to be tax exempt so that donations will be tax deductible. Donations must come from diverse sources (not all from one donor) and careful record keeping is essential. The tax-exempt status will be temporary for about 3 years.

In order for the Trust to be dissolved we need to turn our money over to the Town – they will in turn give it back to the Friends Group once it has been formed. Deb is concerned that the money in the hands of the Town could be otherwise appropriated by Town Meeting. The alternative is to turn the money over to the Town and the

Finance Director would manage it as a separate account. There is a statutory provision that allows the Town to hold funds for the COA. We could then keep the Friends money separate and have 2 accounts. The issues are: (1) to start the Friends Group (2) to dissolve the money and have it held separately in Town (3) to complete the application for a non-profit corporation. Deb will review the application when complete.

**Nursing Center Update:**

**Nancy** announced that the Nursing Center is closed for the present time. Nancy will meet with the Health Department Director next week regarding their role with the Nursing Center. Protocols need to be reviewed.

**SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATE**

**Comprehensive Planning Committee:**

**Rosemary** explained that each of the seven Work Groups is looking at the thousands of ideas from the public, focusing on the ideas specific to their group, finding emerging themes among those ideas and creating a Draft Goal based on those themes. The goals will be presented to the public at Community Choices on March 28 when the public will tell us if the goals comply with their vision for Amherst.

**Highland Valley Elder Services:**

**Barbara** mentioned the Monday meeting featuring the Valley Radio Reading Service. She passed the information along to Maura.

**COA STAFF REPORTS**

**Counseling Center Update:**

**Maura** said the Center has received Title III funds from HVES. The Center is open and has 2 graduate students with a minimal number of hours. The grant money is large so they would like to increase the clientele and add two independent clinical social workers that would be paid 2-3 hours per week thru the grant plus have additional hours for psychotherapy. At present a client can receive 6 sessions of free therapy. They are also looking into a small grant through Cooley Dickinson Hospital for a Memory Screening Clinic.

**Student Volunteer Program:**

**Maura** spoke in Marlene's absence. Marlene has begun interviewing students for community service.

The COA meeting was adjourned at 10:55 AM.

**The next meeting will be held on March 15, 2007 at 9:00 AM.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Rosemary Kofler, Secretary